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ABSTRACT

A review of the college foreign language requirement and the general status of language instruction in the curriculum leads to suggestions for curricular reform at all educational levels. The malaise of the college student is explored and a call is made for reexamination of the rationale and content of language programs. A two-stage curriculum is urged in which the teaching of culture be given a preeminent position. Distinctions between biculturalism and bilingualism are also discussed. The audiolingual and the cognitive code-learning approaches to second language learning are contrasted and their weaknesses criticized. The development of better student and teacher relationships is seen to be of immediate importance and inextricably bound to curricular relevance. (RL)

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THE LANGUAGE LEARNER -- REACHING HIS HEART AND MIND
COGNITION, RELATIONSHIP, RELEVANCY

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I am pleased to see that at this conference of teachers we begin with the learner: the language learner. But are we to have another conference entre nous or are we going to invite the learner in? To set the tone I will do just this.

Recently I have been reading a very interesting booklet -- the student evaluation booklet of a very well-known university -- and I read some very provocative things in it. As teachers we have been deploring the dropping of the foreign language requirement in many universities: What does the student say?

--"Les Misérables got its title from all the lucky people taking (Zulu 101). Many liked the course, but few liked having to take it."

-- "Of course, everybody despised this course, although a few of the instructors were fine people and didn't deserve to have to teach under such absurd circumstances."

-- "As a foreign language requirement this course contains all the necessary grammar and vocabulary except for words of frustration, hostility and anger. A good dictionary will fill in those educationa. gaps."

-- "(This course) ruins most students' averages, it ruins their morale, it ruins their social life by staying in and studying so much, and it really ruins any desire that any would have to learn a foreign language."

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--"Most felt that if they had an interest in the subject they would take it anyway, so to drop it as a requirement. One student suggested hijacking the whole department to (Zuluville)."

Well !!! So we want to fight for the retention of the foreign language requirement in all colleges to keep us in business ! Hadn't we better listen to these voices becoming more and more clamorous and look into

--our raison d'être -- that is, our genuine educational contribution,

--And our programs in relation to our students and the community?

--"Most students considered (Zulu) irrelevant to themselves and their interests."

Perhaps this comment should be our starting point. It isn't the first time that foreign language teachers have had to rethink their position. We all know about cultural lag -- the way institutions tend to get out-of-step with the changes in community thinking and living, and the period of dislocation that inevitably follows. We seem to be entering into such a period again.

We all know very well that ours is a period of rapid change, accelerating change, such as other centuries have not known. At this stage I would ask you to listen to the voice of a beloved leader of our foreign-language community: Stephen Freeman writing in 1941: He quotes the then Commissioner of the New York State Department of Education, Commissioner Loomis, as saying in 1940:

"It is probably unfortunate for the foreign languages that for so long they enjoyed positions so impregnably protected that . . . teachers were free from the necessity of giving thought to what they did, why they did it, or what the outcomes were, if any." To which Stephen Freeman adds: "Now, we modern language teachers must be alive, on our toes, must know where we are going, and how to get there.[1]

How "relevant" that sounds today! We foreign language teachers are accustomed to crises -- they come with great regularity, and each time we have to rethink "where we are going, and how to get there." Rationale and content must be re-examined.

Perhaps the universities (and the students) are doing us a service by questioning the value to them in college of required foreign language courses. Perhaps such courses shouldn't be there? Shouldn't we see that the battle is fought in the high schools, junior high schools, and elementary schools? Shouldn't we bring the whole weight of our profession to support our colleagues there? Shouldn't we see that a relevant language experience is provided for all as part of their general education, at an age when they can most benefit from it, and maintain our position there where it is already established?

Or should foreign languages be taught at all in our late 20th century situation?

--"Most students considered (Zulu) irrelevant to themselves and their interests."

-- "It is a disgusting testimony to the inflexibility of this university and to its unresponsiveness to student input that the

foreign language requirement still exists . . . Most people forget what they learned so soon after they've finished that even those who someday make it to Europe or South America can't use it. Besides, in this electronic age, the ideal of a multi-lingual Renaissance man is pitifully camp. You can travel farther and learn more about 'other cultures' on acid than on a world tour."

Are these complaints rather about the content than the subject itself? Beside them, we can put several other quotations like the following:

--"Too many books, too much stress on grammar, too little emphasis on their culture."

Perhaps we have been unable to get away in our thinking from the ideal, which comes from the days of selective high schools and privileged undergraduates, that all foreign language students should be expected to attain near-native mastery of the language -- in all skills -- an ideal which is impossible in the time available to us in most situations (and here I am not thinking of courses for foreign-language majors). We aim at near-native mastery forall and design our courses accordingly, then we leave up to eighty percent of the students somewhere along the way, sometimes not very far. When they realize how little they know and how little they can use it, they become frustrated and hostile, and they grow into parents and community leaders opposed to such an experience for their children. How familiar this is to all of us! Can we claim any longer that <u>all</u> students need to attain this kind of language mastery? And, if we don't, does this mean an abandoning of our position that foreign language study has a

place in the general education of all students?

I don't think it does. In a recent paper, I have already stated my conviction that foreign language study has such a place in the following terms:

"The unique contribution of foreign language study which is truly educational in the sense that it expands the student's personal experience of his environment, and truly humanistic in that it adds a new dimension to his thinking is the opportunity it provides for breaking through monolingual and monocultural bonds, revealing to the student that there are other ways of saying things, other values and attitudes than those to which his native language and culture have habituated him. Through this experience he may develop new attitudes to ideas and peoples which will reduce his bondage to the familiar and the local and increase his sympathy for persons of other cultures and languages. The new generation student in our schools is internationalist and inter-culturalist in his aspirations: he is also brutally direct in demanding the rationale of what we are doing and of what we are asking him to do. This basic contribution which foreign language can make to his development is one which he would welcome: but he must see that what we do in our classrooms really achieves such a purpose or he will drop out as soon as he conveniently may. If as Harold Taylor has said: "The first task of education... is to raise the level of awareness and response to <u>all</u> ideas, events, people and objects," then foreign language taught with this end firmly in view can still claim that it has a rightful place in the overall

educational program of the school.

Unfortunately: the student and our fellow teachers do not see that this is actually what we do in our programs. Here, I would like to draw your attention to a recent article of Dwight Bolinger in the Modern Language Journal where he pleads for us to "change our base of operations."[3] Speaking also of "cultural awareness" as well as "intellectual appreciation of language in its essence" he asks: "How is it that these values could escaps us? I can think of no logical reason except that we have regarded them as by-products instead of essential ingredients in the learning process." I commend this article to you for careful consideration.

We must decide what it is that we want every student to carry away even from one year's experience of foreign language study. If it is a change in attitude -- in his attitude towards another culture and towards his own, and in his attitude to his own language and to language and communication as such -- then we must design our program so that such an outcome is really achieved and evident. I submit that we have been giving too much thought to the formal structure of our programs while retaining the same old content: individualized instruction, computer-assisted instruction, writing behavioral objectives, systems approaches, or what you will, are still tailored to the present and future tense in Level One, the past and conditional tense in Level Two, the awesome subjunctive in Level Three.

For your consideration, I am going to propose a two-stage foreign-language program -- for college, for high school, for junior high school, for elementary school: wherever foreign-language study is begun.

Stage One would be designed as terminal, designed so that whoever passed through it would have gained something of educational and humanistic value, even if he never studied a foreign language again in his lifetime. This would also be the stage for creating interest and enthusiasm in some, who would then wish to go on to Stage Two because they really wanted to master the language. Stage One would then be an end in itself and not merely the elementary stage of Stage Two, and certainly not pre-anything.

What would we aim for in Stage One? At the moment, I would say at least four things.

First: An introduction to language itself through a specific foreign language, gearing our study to the way language operations express meanings and the many ways meanings can be encoded, the way our language expresses our way of looking at things and the way another language expresses another people's way of looking at things; -- this study would be quite frankly contrastive.

Second: An introduction to another people through language. -- the way another people think and feel and value in contradistinction to our own preoccupations and attitudes.

Third: An experience of being another people -- communicating as they do, acting as they do, thinking as they do.

Fourth: An experience of communication with another people -- speaking with them (where possible), writing to them, sharing with them through joint or exchange projects, working and playing with them (where a neighbouring community makes this possible).

Methodologically we would aim at active involvement of all students in planning, in group research, in interdisciplinary exploration, in human contacts in nearby communities or through correspondence.

Such a course would not be a waste of time for those who wished to master the language. It would foster attitudes which would carry them through the long, and often tedious, stages of disciplined language study. Our Stage Two students would not be a conscripted, but a self-selected, clientele with considerable experience in the area and an autonomous desire to do what they were doing.

I can already hear the old objections: Isn't this lowering standards? How are you going to test these courses across the board so as to satisfy administrators and parents? (For too long we have allowed the latter problem to hamstring our endeavors at realistic change). There need be no lowering of standards. Since the objectives will be different, we will expect different outcomes, a different type of achievement, and we will design different tests to conform with our objectives. We will expect to test, for instance, for certain understandings, for certain attitudes, for a new freedom we hope our students will have achieved, and we will design different tests to conform with our objectives. We will expect to test, for instance, for certain understandings, for certain attitudes, for a new freedom we hope our students will have achieved. Such an approach may very well mean no test in the conventional sense of the word.

Now my Canadian friends are probably saying to themselves: Perhaps this is all right for New York, but what about Ontario, Canada. Our national aim is bilingualism and biculturalism. I am conscious of this, but, as has often been pointed out, there is a difference between bilingual institutions and a nation of bilingual individuals. As no less an authority than Einar Haugen has observed: complete bilingualism in a country leads to monolingualism. You must have monolingual individuals for bilingualism to be maintained. There will therefore continue to be many areas in Canada where one language or the other will be dominant and in these areas there will continue to be the same problems of resistance on the part of many students to being forced to go all the way through the laborious process of language mastery -- "Total immersion" programs have shown excellent results in pilot projects but it will be a long time before all Anglos will be willing for their children to pursue all their early schooling in French, and before all French-speaking Canadians will be willing for their children to have all their early schooling in English, which would, of course, be the logical counterpart.

So my suggested two-stage program may well be worth considering, at least in certain situations. It suggests biculturalism and then bilingualism, with programs aimed at developing new attitudes and new understandings coming first, so that all the population may experience these, and then programs for language mastery, (that is, bilingualism) at the second stage when motivation to learn the other language will be stronger because of the Stage One experience, as Wallace Lambert's 1961 studies of motivation show.

The present approach arouses hostility and frustration in many. Isn't it time, then, to consider new structures and a new content?

Obviously such an approach will involve careful planning and preparing of materials, with perhaps pilot projects to work out the best ways of proceeding. The present situation requires some intensive original thinking. As a profession, I believe we are capable of carrying such a project through.

Now let us look at Stage Two which will be more akin to the language learning situation to which we are accustomed.

Here we may call in our student witness again and hear some comments on what we often call the intermediate level of language learning.

--"I am taking (Zulu) not as a requirement but for the pleasure and hope of knowing Zulu. I am not as vindictive as the trapped students, but I am on their side. The course negates its purpose by forcing down grammar and rules but not teaching us how to speak the language. I can't say anything off the top of my head, it all comes out as phrases from the book." (This student is at a school where Zulu is supposedly taught by an audio-lingual method.)

-- If they are serious about this speaking and listening thing, they had better figure out a different system -- it simply doesn't work -- pattern drills, labs, phones, etc. An enormous amount of their energy and our boredom yielding very little."

Is this attitude untypical? Have we paid lip-service to communication (that is, two-way communication) but been satisfied

with the correct answers to trite questions (answers which often come directly from the book)?

What has been wrong in our approach? Is the answer merely that we should forthwith switch from an audio-lingual to what is being called so freely a cognitive code-learning approach?

Where did this new term come from anyway? It came from an article on "The Contributions of Psychological Theory and Educational Research to the Teaching of Foreign Languages" by John B. Carroll, published in A. Valdman, ed, Trends in Language Teaching in 1966,[4] on the basis of a 1964 paper at the International Conference on Modern Foreign Language Teaching, in Berlin). In this article, Carroll stressed the need for "information on which of these theories" (audiolingual habit theory and cognitive code-learning theory) "is a better basis for foreign language teaching."[5] Cognitive code-learning, he said, "may be thought of as a modified, up-to-date grammar-translation theory."[6] He went on to say that "neither the audiolingual habit theory nor the cognitive code-learning theory is closely linked to any contemporary psychological theory of learning". Adding that "neither theory takes adequate account of an appreciable body of knowledge that has accumulated in the study of verbal learning."[7] He proceeded then to set out the kind of "theory-derived principles" which teachers should be considering. He concluded: "Actually, what is needed even more than research is a profound rethinking of current theories of foreign language teaching in the light of contemporary advances in psychological and psycholinguistic theory."[8] He did not

conclude that this would mean throwing away all that had been gained in recent years, but suggested very temperately that revising audiolingual habit theory by "joining with it some of the better elements of the cognitive code-learning theory" might "yield a dramatic change in effectiveness."[9]

This article was carelessly read and led to the setting up of what Professor Carroll called at the 1971 TESOL Conference in New Orleans a "false dichotomy." At this conference, he again called for some synthesis between the two points of view, taking a position very similar to the one I myself had taken in the chapter on "The Place of Grammar" in Teaching Foreign-Language Skills: namely that there is an aspect of language behaviour which does involve the exercising of well-developed habits (the use of correct inflections, pronoun systems and so on), and there is a further aspect which requires a knowledge of the whole language system, and its interrelationships, if the speaker is to have full control for the expression of his intended meaning.

Let us return for a moment to Professor Carroll's 1966 article in which he refers to the "appreciable body of knowledge that has accumulated in the study of verbal learning." The research to which he is referring does not show, as some people appear to be presuming, that "psychology now tells us that we can learn a language better by learning grammar rules, and that this can be called the cognitive approach." (I sometimes wonder if the recent adoption of this type of approach in some circles is because it is so much easier to program the learning of grammar

rules and their application in writing for computerized and individualized instruction assignments.) This attitude has nothing whatever to do with cognitive psychology.

What then is cognitive psychology? As in linguistics, so in psychology there has been a swing to what used to be called "mentalism". We are familiar with the S→R paradigm, which Woodworth and many other psychologists rapidly modified to S-O-R. The question is: What is represented by the O?

The cognitive theorist (and most psychologists interested in verbal learning work closely with the linguists) is interested in what goes on inside the organism. He begins from a pattern of stimulation, as does the behaviourist, but then he departs from the behaviourist who chooses to describe behaviour only in terms of what can be objectively observed and measured. To quote Ulrich Neisser, the author of a book called Cognitive Psychology: "Whatever we know about reality has been mediated, not only by the organs of sense but by complex systems which interpret and reinterpret sensory information. The activity of the cognitive systems results in -- and is integrated with -- the activity of muscles and glands that we call 'behavior'. It is also partially -- very partially -- reflected in those private experiences of seeing, hearing, imagining, and thinking to which verbal descriptions never do full justice."[10] Cognition, as the term is used by cognitive psychologists, Neisser tells us, "refers to all the processes by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used. . . . Given such a

sweeping definition, it is apparent that cognition is involved in everything a human being might possibly do; that every psychological phenomenon is a cognitive phenomenon."[11] Although the study of motivation in the sense of the origin of motives belongs to dynamic psychology (of which Freudian theory is one aspect), the cognitive theorist, according to Neisser, "cannot ignore motivation. Many cognitive phenomena are incomprehensible unless one takes some account of what the subject is trying to do."[12]

Clearly, foreign-language teachers will have much to learn from cognitive psychology because we, of all teachers, need to know how the mind works, how it acquires and functions through symbolic systems. We need to keep abreast of its research findings and seek to apply them. This, as yet, no one in the field has shown us how to do in any extensive way.

We must remember that analogy is a cognitive process, analysis is a cognitive process, and learning rules is a cognitive process. The cognitive psychologist does not "state" that one of these cognitive processes is a superior way of learning to another. He does try to understand the processes involved in each. He is interested in different strategies and operations of learning and the stages of maturation at which each becomes dominant or is at least a possible operation for the child. He is interested in how we recognize and interpret patterns of sound or writing. He is interested in short- and long-term memory. The search for some so-called "cognitive approach" or "cognitive method" for foreign-language teaching is at the present stage of psychological research merely playing with words. There are certainly techniques which are more and less

appropriate to

various cognitive operations and we need to know more about these. I myself have tried to suggest techniques for the developing of listening comprehension, and to some extent reading, by drawing on cognitive research in a forthcoming article: "Linguistic and Psychological Factors in Speech Perception and their Implications for Teaching Materials" to appear later this year in P. Pimsleur and T. Quinn, eds.: Papers on the Psychology of Second Language Learning (Cambridge University Press). I hope you will be interested to read my conclusions when the article appears.

We will need, then, to do much rethinking about what we will do with our students in Stage Two. The cry: "An enormous amount of their energy and our boredom yeilding very little" rings in my ears.

I began with relevancy and moved back to cognition. In conclusion, let us look at relationship.

At this stage I would like to bring in two ideas from a good Canadian, Marshall McLuhan -- that master of alliteration and analogy.

Has it ever occurred to you that we foreign-language teachers are the most authoritarian of teachers? Our subject matter forces us in that direction. We are the only teachers in the school who are always right! We know the language, they don't. We dispense, they absorb. If we are not careful, our teaching procedures are structured that way: even at the advanced level, we structure the question, our structuring and the

reading material supply the answer. Don't we often end up with some such exchange as the following?

-- Should the boy have told his father what happened to his friend?

-- No, he shouldn't have told his father what happened to his friend.

-- Why shouldn't he have told his father?

-- He shouldn't have told his father because he had promised his friend to keep it secret (all this is in the text, of course).

The medium is the message.[13] The student learns from our structuring of the lesson that foreign language is pseudo-language. It is good for questions and answers on the material read; it is good for drills and exercises and even for pronunciation practice. It has nothing whatever to do with expressing your own thoughts. Is this what your classroom teaches the student? The student learns far more than we realize.

McLuhan also tells us we have moved suddenly from the age of the wheel to the age of the circuit. -- Whereas the wheel merely conveyed materials and data, the circuit interrelates and is a thing of feedback. From an era of transmission we move into an age of feedback which is also an age of involvement."[14]

Isn't this what language behaviour always was? A two-way affair (or three-way, or four-way affair) of feedback and inter-relationship? The circuit is particularly appropriate for our occupation. We hear, we relate, we give out, we take in, we relate, we give out ... If in relating, we feel embarrassed, humiliated, insecure, we say stop to that operation: and so do

our students.

If we keep the circuit in the forefront of our thinking we will not only communicate to our students but we will hear them. With feedback from us they will learn to communicate in the foreign language; with feedback from them we will learn how best to help them learn. Let us move, then, from the age of the wheel to the age of the circuit for our own mental well-being and that of our students.

Now I expect some feedback from you!

N O T E S

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